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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Attorney General's Office, Mesa Police Department and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Break Up Drug Trafficking Organization

(Phoenix, Ariz. – September 20, 2005) Attorney General Terry Goddard today announced a 285-count indictment against 51 members of the Mendivil-Vega Drug Trafficking Organization responsible for importing large quantities of methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana and heroin from Mexico into metro Phoenix for local and national distribution.

Local Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents and detectives from the Mesa Police Department today executed a takedown of this criminal organization, arresting seven members living in the Valley. Five other members were served State grand jury summons, and 11 were already in custody and were served summons.

"This organization distributed drugs throughout the U.S. and left a trail of shattered lives in its wake," Goddard said. "This joint investigation will make our community safer and take a high amount of dangerous drugs off our streets. This drug ring moved an estimated 20 pounds of meth, 20 kilos of cocaine and 500 pounds of marijuana each month out of Arizona to other parts of the country."

The investigation began in December 2003 when DEA Phoenix was asked by DEA Cleveland for assistance in identifying unknown Arizona residents supplying high-grade methamphetamine to multiple targets in the Cleveland investigation.

Mesa Police Department initiated an investigation in February 2004 involving a violent drug distribution organization made up of gang members tied to several Mexican criminal street gangs operating in Mesa. The Chicago-based Latin King gang recruited gang members in Mesa and established a distribution network.

Information sharing between the two agencies indicated that both investigations were targeting the same organization. In March 2004, DEA Phoenix and the Mesa Police Department joined forces. The joint investigation uncovered distribution of methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana and heroin with day-to-day distribution throughout the Phoenix metro area and stash houses located in Mesa, Phoenix and the West Valley. The organization made routine distributions to several other cities and states and routinely imported drugs from Mexico into U.S. This organization is responsible for several drug-related shootings, gang-related acts of violence and stolen vehicles in the Mesa/Phoenix area.

"This investigation is a prime example of the positive outcome of a well-planned and coordinated team effort," said Mesa Police Chief Dennis Donna. "Through this continued partnership with the DEA, I am confident we will take even more violent criminals off the streets, deter drug trafficking and greatly reduce the number of crimes associated with illegal drugs."

"This cooperative investigation between the Mesa Police Department and the DEA is an example of a federal and local agency working to make our neighborhoods safer for all," said Mesa Police Chief Dennis Donna. "Taking violent people off the street and disrupting the flow of illicit drugs, especially methamphetamine, will help with the identity theft problem, burglaries and violent crime caseloads."

DEA Phoenix and Mesa PD worked with the Arizona Attorney General's Office to secure the 285-count indictment for the following crimes: trafficking in stolen property, participating in an illegal enterprise, fraudulent schemes, money laundering, use of a minor in a drug offense and additional drug trafficking charges.

"It does not matter how hard gangs and other drug distributors try – our team of law enforcement officials will always try harder," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Timothy J. Landrum. "The Mendivil-Vega Drug Trafficking Organization was responsible for the national distribution of dangerous drugs from Mexico. DEA, along with its state and local counterparts, is responsible for the disruption of their deadly network. Working with local police and the Attorney General's Office has, once again, ensured the safety of American citizens nationwide."

Assistant Attorneys General Laura Reckart and Desi Rubalcaba are prosecuting this case. Attached is a list of those arrested today with the charges filed against them and their birth dates.

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